



FRANK R. KLEIN

(1911 – 1990)

Profile of a Master Carver, Cabinet Maker, Carpenter

by Mrs. Grace Klein

As a youngster, Frank was privileged to have access to not only his own set of tools but the use of his father's carpenter tools. Wood, even at that early stage in life, was a fascination and he was able to make his own toys to play with.

As time passed by, he spent many days during summer vacation on the job with his dad who was building houses all over the West Side of Cleveland. So, his love for working with wood grew stronger as he grew older.

The economy changed in Greater Cleveland and no building was being done. After high school, [Frank] had to see employment elsewhere. One job he had was working for a hardware store, again a place that sold all kinds of tools and building materials, everything except wood. Then, his boss decided to move to Florida so that left him without employment. He applied for a job with Standard Oil and worked at several stations on the West Side of Cleveland. It was during this period that he married after a courtship of five years. Times were still very rough back in 1937 and still no building [was] being done.

It was during his employment at Standard Oil that they discovered his artistic ability. When they had promotions of all kinds at various times of the year, he was asked to go to different stations and sign, write and draw things pertaining to the super special they were offering. At the holidays, he went around and drew large Santas on the picture windows at the stations. A lot of this was done on his days off and netted us a little more cash to run on, for which we were truly grateful for salaries at that time were very low.

Then the break came and in 1940 he was able to join the Carpenters Union and business began to pick up. He was once again working with wood. Things seemed to be going along so nice and smooth and then the War. Our son was born in July 1943 and, in October Frank went into the Army, served 2-1/2 years in Hawaii and, after the end of the War, returned home safe and sound. [He] picked up the pieces where we left off at and Frank resumed working at his trade.

He worked for many large companies and was superintendent for a company that built streets of homes on the West Side. He drew up the plans and saw to it that each house was just a little bit different so they were not all alike. That came to an abrupt end as his boss died on the steps of City Hall in Cleveland of a heart attack. [Frank] worked to finish the houses that were under construction.

From that time on, he worked for various companies including the remodeling of Higbee's and May's in downtown Cleveland and then came out to do Higbee's in Parmatown. He has the unique ability to see a plan and see the finished product in his mind's eye.

His carpentry work continued until 1973 when he retired. That, however, was not the end of his working with wood.

Sometime during the 1970s, he saw an article in our local paper telling about [the] Buckeye Wood Carving Group that was being formed in Twinsburg. It intrigued him and on a Sunday afternoon took off for Twinsburg, 25 miles [with] no freeways at the time. He met with the men at the meeting and fell in love with what he saw. Erwin Caldwell was their first president, Jerry Hall, the secretary and Lester Mayer, the treasurer. [He] came home all enthused for at that meeting he met the editor of Chip Chats, Ed Galenstein who demonstrated and gave a talk to this newly formed group. Frank is not a charter member but came in soon after.

When the Caldwells decided to move to Texas, Frank took his place as president and kept it for two years. They had great meetings, lots of demonstrations and talks from knowledgeable people. Their group grew in great numbers. They are still an active group. This past year, they held their second mini show, (the first being held when Frank was president). It was a huge success for small quarters; a great number of people came out to see it and were impressed.

A number of the Buckeye Wood Carvers Guild members felt Twinsburg was too far to go to a meeting so Frank started the Parma Wood Carvers Guild to accommodate them and picked up a great number of men and women. For those who felt they needed special help, he had classes they could attend at our home and it did help to stimulate the wood carving interest to be able to get instructions; some of the class people never cared anything in their lives and were so proud of what they were able to do with the help of Frank's teaching.

I can't remember the year we had several inquiries about starting a group up in the Vermilion area. These people had come to one of the Parma shows and wanted that for their area. One Saturday afternoon Dave Morton and his wife, Penny, came to our house and spent the entire time with Frank getting all the information needed to start the Lorain County Club. They went home so enthusiastic that Frank was sure this was going to be a great carving club. [He] was proud to be the one they called upon [for] his expertise to start their club.

One of the main things he feels is important to a group is to put on a carving show. It stimulates the members, shows the public what can be done and gets new members for the club. It's a lot of work but the efforts are well rewarded when you see the number of happy people turn out to see it. It also gives you the opportunity to meet with other carvers from all over not only our state [but] surrounding states as well. It's like a big carving family and at the various shows it's like a reunion.

Frank has worked with men from Youngstown, Wadsworth and talked long distance to several other interested men in various places. [He] has mailed by-laws, etc. to a number of groups.

We try to attend as many meetings as we can in Vermilion and South Amherst to help in any way we can. Besides, we like you people, you folks are carving family members.

Frank was diagnosed as having Alzheimer's in December 1984; however, his memory loss went back several years prior. On May 26, 1989, he was placed at the Meadowview Care Center of Seville, Ohio, where in the course of a year his health failed considerably.

On May 8, 1990, Frank passed away with pneumonia.